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Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Solidarity Network
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Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
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March 20th, 2020

Dear Minister Champagne,

We urge you to take decisive and immediate action to support the return of Canadian citizens currently stranded in Guatemala following the Guatemalan government's March 17th announcement of border closures for 15 days, aimed at containing the COVID-19 pandemic. This decision resulted in a suspension of all land and airline travel in and out of Guatemala.

This unforeseen crisis is directly affecting our organization's staff and volunteers currently working in Guatemala. The Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS) is a solidarity network that has supported the work of Guatemalan human rights defenders and educated Canadians on human rights issues for over three decades. BTS is based at Tatamagouche Centre, a United Church of Canada education and retreat centre. The BTS' Human Rights and Community Development Cooperant Program, launched in 2019, enables Maritimers and other Canadians to volunteer with our partners in Guatemala. This program is coordinated in Guatemala by staff member and Lead Cooperant, Kristofer Orantes Migoya, with the support of BTS Guatemala Coordinator, Lisa Rankin. In January and February of 2020, BTS placed three cooperants, Laura Robinson (from Rothsay, New Brunswick), Indigo Christ (from Halifax, Nova Scotia) and Lenora Yarkie (from Edmonton, Alberta) to work with longstanding BTS partner organization.

Once a pandemic was announced, BTS proactively proceeded with measures to ensure cooperants' safe return to Canada as soon as possible and plane tickets were purchased. This move came even before Canadian government's call for its citizens to return home. Unfortunately, however these flights were cancelled. Since the closing of the borders by the Guatemalan government, our attempts to contact the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala to obtain support have been unsuccessful. We made arrangements to provide appropriate accommodation and basic necessities to cooperants for the next 14 days to maximize protection of their health and safety, incurring significant and unexpected costs in the process.

Given the magnitude of the crisis and its impacts in Guatemala, we are extremely concerned for the health and safety of BTS staff and cooperants, as well as the safety of all Canadian citizens currently in Guatemala. We urge the Canadian government to put all necessary measures in place to assist Canadian

citizens stranded in Guatemala, including Laura Robinson, Lenora Yarkie, Indigo Christ, in returning home as soon as possible, as well as support for travel arrangements for Lisa Rankin and Kristofer Orantes Migoya in returning home.

This includes the following measures:

1. Provide a contact person at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City to ensure a steady flow of communications and timely access to information, to provide logistical support and to coordinate repatriation efforts as soon as possible;
2. Provide daily updates from Canadian Embassy consular services to ALL who are registered with ROCA.
3. Engage Guatemalan authorities immediately in order to negotiate the return of Canadian citizens currently stranded in Guatemala as soon as possible, whether through official or unofficial channels;
4. Make arrangements to guarantee the safe return of Canadians currently in Guatemala, including organizing a chartered bus from Guatemala City to an airport in Mexico with direct flights to Canada, and supporting the arrangement of flights from Mexico to Canada.
5. Develop a contingency plan in the event the current situation is prolonged;
6. Provide support to Canadians stranded in Guatemala to ensure access to basic necessities and health care should they require it.

The Canadian government has the responsibility to provide the necessary support to all its citizens in Guatemala who wish to return home and currently unable to do so, including enacting measures to protect their health and safety while in Guatemala. Canada must lead by example and simply cannot abandon its citizens abroad in the midst of one of the most acute global health crisis in recent history. We are counting on you to ensure that swift action is taken to address this urgent situation.

Please inform us as soon as possible of the actions of the Canadian government concerning stranded Canadians in Guatemala.

Yours sincerely,



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